

Hope

ROMANS 5:1-2

Last week, I began this series on **4-Letter Words** (all of them biblical words) with a look at the subject of God's love.

I pointed out in that sermon that God's love is

1. Universal
2. Unconditional
3. Unlimited – at least towards those who are redeemed.

We also noted that God loves sinners. If He did not, there would be no opportunity for salvation. Yet there is a limit to God's love for those who are wicked, referring to those who, over the long term of their lives, refuse to repent or to acknowledge the lordship of Christ.

To earn God's wrath means that a person has to desire God's wrath more than His love, for it is never God's desire to punish. God is patient and kind and longsuffering and is therefore a Savior. But He is also holy and righteous and just. And because He is all of these things, He is also judge to those who are wicked.

Today, I want to look at another word that is so needed in our world today, and that is hope.

In light of current events about the world's financial condition, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and terrific death tolls, of persecution and martyrdom of Christians all around the world on a daily basis – Is it any wonder that so many have no hope?

Closer to home, there are lost jobs, bank foreclosures, domestic violence, gangs and a government that is seemingly impotent to lead at almost any level – is there any doubt about the reason for such a high degree of hopelessness in the land?

What is there to motivate the ordinary man to continue – to make the effort to succeed?

Alexander Pope wrote, "Hope springs eternal within the human breast." It is something that man cannot live without and causes us to survive even the worst of conditions.

Illustration

I read a story about a passenger on a long and rough Atlantic crossing who was violently seasick. He was leaning over the rail of the ocean liner and had turned several shades of green.

A steward came along and tried to cheer him up by saying, "Don't be discouraged, sir! You know, no one's ever died of seasickness yet!"

The nauseated passenger looked up at the steward with an evil look and replied, "Oh, don't say that! It's only the hope of dying that's kept me alive this long!"

Some of the most popular movies of all time are about hope.

- It's a Wonderful Life
- Chronicles of Narnia
- Love Affair
- Facing the Giants
- Hotel Rwanda
- Cinderella
- Ice Age

Hope is essential to our existence – as essential as water is to life, as the air we breathe, and the food that is required for sustenance and good health.

It is the reason that "hopeless" is the word or at least the sentiment between the lines of every suicide note.

The Bible teaches us that hopelessness exists because of sin and of man's rejection of God.

Eph. 2:12 Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

The world may be without hope, but this should never be said of those who claim to know Christ as Lord.

We who know Christ, above all people on the earth, have hope beyond measure. While disappointment and apprehension are part of human nature, we should never reach a point of despair.

2 Tim. 1:7 God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and a sound mind (self-control).

1 John 2:17 The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Almost from the time we entered the ministry, a verse that has meant a great deal to Ann and me...

Jer. 29:11 "I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (NIV)

We take that verse to heart, for it speaks of God's hand of mercy on us and of His perfect plan for our lives and His provision of hope. Yet we are also aware of the context in which the verse is given.

Have you ever studied the earlier verses of Jeremiah 29 to see where the nation of Israel was when these words were read to them?

Jer. 29:1 This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. (NIV)

- Israel is in captivity.
- Their homes had been destroyed.
- Many of their families had been slaughtered before their very eyes.
- They had been forced to abandon their homes and gardens and the life they had known for centuries

- forced to march for miles and miles across barren, burning deserts to a land
- where they had no relatives and no ties and no language.

Yet God says it is here, in this place that I plan to prosper you, to give you hope and a future.

The foundation of Biblical prophecy is God's love, but its substance is faith and the hope of deliverance and glory in the presence of God.

That is what is meant by our text for today.

Romans 5:2 ...we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Hope is used in some form in Scripture, both OT & NT, about 137 times. It is a major theme in God's message to the world and to His people.

It means more than expectation, because that can refer to either good or bad things. Hope always makes reference to the desire for good things to happen and along with that desire an expectation of obtaining the thing desired.

Hope and faith are inseparable concepts, yet they are not the same.

Hope is the desire you have for your team to win the big game.

Faith is believing that they can win and that they will.

Desiring that your team would win without believing that they can is a forlorn hope.

Illustration

Helen Hayes, famous actress of days gone by, told of the first time she cooked a Thanksgiving turkey for her husband, Charles MacArthur, and their son, James.

She told them, "Now I know this is the first turkey I've ever cooked. If it isn't any good, I don't want anybody to say a word. We'll just get up from the table, without comment, and go out to a restaurant to eat."

Then she returned to the kitchen.

When she entered the dining room bearing the turkey, there were her husband and son seated at the table with their hats and coats on.

Faith is based on our intellect and knowledge.

Hope is the decision to live the truth of our faith.

Eph. 1:18 [I pray that] the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

Faith is the evidence for those things which are beyond our view.

- Faith is learning – Hope is looking.
- Faith is loving – Hope is leaning.
- Faith is living – Hope is longing.

Faith is looking to the promise – Hope is longing for the product.

For the Jews, their hopes were centered on the Messiah. Their entire religion was one of hope. But they were so blinded by their own importance that they missed the blessing of seeing their hopes fulfilled.

For Christ fulfilled every prophecy related to the Messiah.

Heb. 7:19 For the law made nothing perfect (brought nothing to fulfillment, realized no goals), but the bringing in of a better hope did (meaning Christ); by the which (or by Whom) we draw nigh unto God.

Matt. 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

Matt. 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

But the Jews failed to recognize their Messiah – He for whom they had hoped for generation after generation – which meant that, for the Jew who fails to recognize Christ, there is no hope.

Rom. 8:24 ...hope that is seen is no longer hope, because who hopes for what he already sees?

For the Jews, Jesus fulfilled all of their hopes. They missed it. So, short of a saving encounter with Christ, they are hopeless.

On the other hand, those who know Christ as Savior are filled with hope.

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (ESV)

Our hopes are very much alive because Jesus is alive having been resurrected by the Father.

1 Peter 1:20 He (Christ) was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Now I want you to notice something about these verses related to faith and hope.

Remember that faith is believing my team can win. Hope is my desire for victory.

To hope my team will win without any faith in their ability to win is a forlorn hope. And to express my faith in the team without the hope for their victory is a futile and empty kind of faith.

We have faith in – we believe in – Christ.

As a result of our faith, we hope for things that we cannot yet see: eternal life, heaven, the presence of Christ, and, ultimately, for the glory of God.

In fact, the ultimate goal of salvation is not just to bring us into relationship with Christ, but to reconcile us to the Father through that relationship with Christ. That is what Christ has done for us. His death and resurrection have completed all that is needed to affect that reconciliation.

John 14:6 *Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me.*

We know that all men are sinners by nature and that sin is simply the fruit of our nature. We also know that we have all sinned willingly, and in doing so, we justify God's judgment against us.

Romans 3:23 says "*for all have sinned and fallen short*" – fallen short of Christ? Of heaven? No, "*of the glory of God.*"

On our best days and in our most righteous moments, we still fall short of the glory of God. We are not worthy to enter into His presence and to know Him in all of His glory – that is, apart from the saving power of Jesus Christ.

Col. 1:27 *To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:*

The message is made clear in all of these verses that the purpose of our faith in Christ is so that we will know the only true hope – our hope in the glory of God.

Romans 5:2 *...we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

Heb. 7:19 *(It is through the better hope of Christ that) we draw nigh unto God.*

1 Peter 1:21 *(God raised Christ from the dead) so that your faith and hope are in God.*

Gal. 3:26 *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*

Salvation is so much more than a get-out-of-hell-free card. It is so much more than getting our sins forgiven and the promise of eternal life.

It is knowing that finally, we are reconciled to the God of the Universe and will one day be able to stand in His presence and celebrate for eternity around His throne because of the blessed hope of Christ's return when our faith becomes sight and all of our hopes are realized.